

An Innovation of Misguidance: Amīna Wadūd's Unenlightened Feminism

GF Haddad Ramadan — 1426 / October 2005

“The people shall always be in a good state as long as they take their knowledge from their elders, their trusted ones, and their people of knowledge. When they start taking it from their boys and their reprobates, they shall be destroyed.”

– ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd.¹

IN MARCH, 2005 the so-called American “Progressive Muslims” movement orchestrated a Friday prayer at the Synod House of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City with men and women congregants led by a woman named Amīna Wadūd, presented by her advertizers as a “professor of Islamic studies at Virginia Commonwealth University” and “the author of the groundbreaking book *Qur’ān and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*.”² Their boast of the latter as “the first woman to lead men in prayers” shows a studious, unprincipled ignorance of the defining role of past practice in the understanding of misguided innovation. A sister movement, the “Muslim Women’s League,” did boast a precedent in Ghazālat al-Shabībiyya.³ This dajjālīc character was the mother of the lawless Khārijī Shabīb ibn Yazīd ibn Nu‘aym al-Shaybānī (d. 77) who had placed her on the *minbar* of al-Kūfa to give *khutba* after he had stormed it at the head of an army of eight hundred men and two hundred arm-bearing women – until, after two years of bloody rampage and civil unrest, al-Ḥajjāj destroyed them and their followers.⁴

The “Progressives” and their friends have resolved their inability to prove the licitness of their behavior within Islām by flouting the system from outside with a *J’accuse!* of chauvinism and male sexism

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that begins with our liege-lords Abū Hurayra and Abū Bakrah and trudges centuries of sexist Qur'anic exegesis, sexist jurisprudence, and sexist ḥadīth transmission down to our times. Only so can they can apocalyptically “break the interpretive monopoly,” that is, pick and choose from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in a vacuum, free at last from the annoying guidelines and preconditions of scholarly exertion in Islām such as ethics, knowledge of Arabic, a firm grasp of the texts, and a living familiarity with our legal and intellectual history.

The anti-method of the “Progressives” contains the seeds of their own demise: the very claim that it is legitimate for anybody to claim authority makes it all the more possible to reject the claimant's authority in turn and start perpetually newer, more “progressive” trends from where the previous trend left off, often disowning it as the early Khārījites did of one another. The “Progressives,” for example, have invented a *ḥijābless* prayer for themselves as their New York congregation displayed. One day their female leader might actually make this state of undress the law and frown upon its lingering use by female congregants still possessed of a (male chauvinistic) sense of shame. Later, American “Progressive” illuminatas will insist that the Fātiḥa be recited in English inside prayer (perhaps allowing Swahili during Kwanzaa), free from racist Arabocentric strictures.

In the end, a Muslim might pray in short shorts behind his sing-songy female imām with the non-Arab accent, after she has graced the congregants with a khutba about “God, praise Her.” She is *ḥijābless* “because *Lā ikraha fīl-Dīn*” and shakes hands indifferently with men, none of whom minds that she wears “Opium” to the prayer. Another congregant prays with malt liquor on her breath. The man right next to her prays in a *junub* state but he is not *junub* according to a *ẓāhirī* position if there was no ejaculation. He married his granddaughter, which is licit according to a *khārījī* position – temporarily and without witnesses, of course. Their self-imagined Sufis

are fond of name-throwing “Ibn ‘Arabī” – whom they might rank slightly above René Guénon – to reject whatever ruling of the Qur'ān and Sunna that does not fit their idea of the *Dīn*, although they cannot begin to quote the words of Ibn ‘Arabī, even less the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Whoever suggests the necessity of taking religious knowledge from those who are knowledgeable in the Religion they consider a rigid and possibly pro-terrorist conservative. They all pay their religion-neutral non-mosque hall rent with interest earnings but do not consider that *zakāt* is due on paper money, thus saving a bundle which they can invest in Halliburton or Annhauser-Bush stocks so they can live the good life.

All of the above types can still holler that they are Muslims, that they are followers of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, though not of his command to hold fast to his way and that of his rightly-guided companions by biting on it with their very jaws.

One of the arguments for banning formal prayer from U.S. public schools is that others would then have their chance to pray their own way too, including Satanists. Each of the horrendous “prayer of the future” scenarios we have extrapolated is based on a *fiqh*-arguable position in the books to illustrate that when you subordinate worship to a (wo)man-made discourse on equality and democracy you open a very risky door. A skillful enough academic with a moral mission such as Khālīd Abūl Fadl (who has boasted of praying behind his wife long before the New York travesty) or Ṭāriq Ramaḍān can revive each and every one of those heresies and sell them to U.S. shoppers as a new and improved, updated, politically correct Islam.

Defenders of the “Progressives” dismiss this historically-based model of the Pandoran dynamics of unbridled revisionism as a *reductio ad absurdum*. They evade the fundamental issue of the lawlessness of innovation and instead shed crocodile tears for “the very real social problems of which this controversy is but one symptom.” In their misty eyes, enough misbehavior by bad Mus-

lim men provides enough justification to tamper with the roots of the Religion and radically revise the very contents of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, not to mention their binding and probative force on the Muslims. They applaud the very novelties which our Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, decried as “newfangled matters neither you nor your forefathers ever heard of before.” In their hurry to emulate the former followers of Moses and Jesus, they would have the Muslims disappear into the lizard-hole of ex-believers who “liberated” themselves into irreligion.

Sadly for the “Progressives,” our Prayer is not a platform for pluralism. Valid concerns about family and gender issues no more suddenly make the modalities of Muslim worship negotiable than did, say, the valid concerns of non-Arabs against Arabocentrism in the time of al-Jāhiz. or in Iran or Kemalist Turkey. One should not have to tamper with *Ṣalāt* in the process of inveighing against the sins of male pride or sexism. We need not run out of options other than throw the baby with the bath water; surely the *Umma* has more imagination than that and more resources than to tamper with its Pillars. Surely our Prophet taught us enough about Allāh for us to worship Allāh for His sake and to know better than to use the sacred as tools for something ulterior. Precaution and common sense (if not knowledge of our Principles) dictate that we not mix the religion with 20th century -isms and liberation theologies; and that we insure at least the formal Divine acceptance of our worship and that of our families through adherence to the “path of the Believers” the Qur'ān makes the precondition for such acceptance.

Nor is blank permission the basic principle (*aṣl*) in matters of worship. In worship, as in the creed, the *aṣl* is *ḥurma* [categorical prohibition] because matters of worship are divinely-ordained. (In sexual intercourse also the *aṣl* is *ḥurma* and becomes permission only through the contract of marriage.) Hence the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, did not say “Pray as you see fit” but “Pray as you see me pray” and he stressed prayer as the central pillar upon which rests the tent of

one's Islam and the first thing for which one shall be brought to account on the Day of Judgment. A concerned Muslim could never advise any son or daughter or brother and sister except the strictest precaution toward it.

For those who still believe there is such a thing as sunna and *bid'a*, not only the multiplicity but the slavish catering of new sects to political and social fads and the unfailing minorityism of old and new sects are all, ultimately, a testimony to the established middle path and a reinforcement of orthodoxy.

A Feminist Muṭtadi'a: Amīna Wadūd

In a May, 2002 brief article published on the internet, “‘A'isha's Legacy: the struggle for women's rights in Islam,” Amīna Wadūd revealed the most simplistic scholarship imaginable, clearly assuming that none of her intended public was qualified to challenge her entirely original presentation of history, law, and hermeneutics. This is who the *New Internationalist* website blurb enthroned as our “foremost Muslim feminist scholar” whose article “will introduce readers to Islamic feminism.”⁵

In the above article Wadūd does a tapdance around the exclusivity of the Qur'ān as a source of Law in Islam except when it comes to illustrating proto-feminist themes, such as praising our Mother ‘A'isha “from whom,” Wadūd says, “the Prophet [upon him blessings and peace] said we should learn ‘half our religion’” (a forgery according to Ibn Ḥajar, Ibn Kathīr, al-Mizzī, al-Dhahabī, al-Qārī, *et alia*). Wadūd chooses to dismiss H. adīth in her main argumentation and when she invokes it to make a point – in violation of her own principles – she invokes the weakest possible kind. This kind of contradiction is all-too-typical of Orientalists and their spokesmen in Muslim veneer; they pit the Qur'ān against Ḥadīth then quote ḥadīthic sources right and left if it suits them.

Wadūd should not have invoked only the Qur'an but also Ḥadīth for the main issues she raises and then only the strong and authentic

ḥadīths. For example, the ḥadith of the creation of woman from a rib which is in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.⁶ Not that Eve “is a flawed female helpmate extracted from him [ādam] as an afterthought or utility”! Those are Wadūd’s own inflammatory words. However, the rib is the protection of the heart and Woman represents the protection of Man rather than the reverse; but for such protection to take place, man must protect woman in the first place. This is because if any harm reaches the rib (woman) then the heart (man) is left unprotected. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said in that very same ḥadith: “Therefore, treat women kindly.” Unfortunately, this ḥadith does not find favor as feminist evidence in feminist discourse.

Similarly, “Qur’ān-only” feminists ignore the fact that it is in the ḥadith that one will find the strongest and most explicit excoriation of wife-beating and that it is from the Qur’ān that Muslim wife-beaters usually fish out their idea of a justification.

These flaws are no accident but underlie a pattern of shoddy thinking – the coarsest, shallowest type of historical revisionism. Wadūd says: “During the Abbasid period, when Islam’s foundations were developed, leading scholars and thinkers were exclusively male. They had no experience with revelation first hand, had not known the Prophet directly and were sometimes influenced by intellectual and moral cultures antithetical to Islam.” The marvelous jump from pro-filing the early Ulema as male non-Companions to actually accusing them of being “sometimes influenced by cultures antithetical to Islam” is mind-boggling. Surely even the worst of Abbasid culture had more immunity to unislamic trends than 21st-century American Muslim culture can dream of achieving! But this pseudo-historicism is only a veneer. All Wadūd wants is for readers to hear “exclusively male” and conclude that the formative period of Muslim culture needs rewriting. However, in the process of her gender assassination she commits blunder after blunder:

1. Leading scholars and thinkers were not exclusively but predominantly male during the Abbasid period as in any other period, and even then, so what? If those Abbasid Scholars had been predominantly women, is it to say that they would have been inherently more honest and qualified?
2. None had “experience with revelation first hand” except Prophets unless she means direct contact with one that had experience with revelation first hand, *i.e.* the Companions, a predominantly male group. Wadūd predictably would have another problem with the fact that the Prophets themselves are an exclusively male category.
3. Every student knows that the Ulema of Islam kept fiercely aloof from politics, let alone “intellectual and moral cultures antithetical to Islam” including philosophy (except for a small number of inordinately discriminating and gifted scholars such as al-Rāzī). To say that they were adversely misguided as a whole is baseless calumny of the first order, not to mention that it tears to shreds the notion of the *Umma*’s infallibility and basically shouts at our Creator: “You have misled us!”

Wadūd goes on to claim: “In particular, they [the male scholars] moved away from the Qur’ān’s ethical codes for female autonomy to advocate instead women’s subservience, silence and seclusion. If women’s agency was taken into consideration it was with regard to service to men, family and community.” This mock trial is the desired caricature of male conspiracy which unenlightened feminists propose. It is not only simplistic but invidious to scholarly history and dishonest to the *Umma* past and present.

Wadūd is the academic face of a fanatically revisionist Islām intent on re-writing not only *Fiqh* and *Tafsīr* but the Qur’ān itself. After she founded the woman group “Sisters in Islam” in

Kuala Lumpur in the early nineties, her teaching contract at the International Islamic University of Malaysia was not renewed. Nevertheless, the seeds were planted and an August, 1994 *Economist* editorial entitled "In the Name of Eve" openly promoted "Sisters in Islam" and their idea of women's "equality that Koran, give or take a verse or two, gives them in principle."

A strong scholarship on the place of woman in Islamic intellectual history should refute such fraudulent endeavors with facts and keep quack feminism out of Islam. This is not to say that issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse, or hasty *hudūd* justice taking place in the midst of Islamic society should not be addressed. They should be addressed, exposed, excoriated; but not at the expense of the entire Islamic tradition. As one student of knowledge wrote, "until practicing Muslims who strive to adhere to *Shari'a*, who study, who would otherwise be labeled as 'conservatives' stand up and say something, Muslim women's issues will continue to be the domain of non-Muslim feminists and the establishment who brush them off with [the remark], 'That's cultural, not Islam,' and then launch into the Lecture on the Ideal Status of Muslim Women versus the Reality of Western Women."

Countless generations of Muslim women played an integral role in transmitting the Religion of Islām from the Prophet Muhammad, upon him and them blessings and peace and his successors including its texts and practice from the earliest centuries down to our time. But in her "first Friday sermon by a woman" according to a *Guardian* article dated Saturday 19 March, 2005⁷ Amina Wadūd is quoted as saying, "Women were not allowed to (have) input in the basic paradigms of what it means to be a Muslim."

An instance of Wadūd's "input in the basic paradigm" is her reference to our Creator as "He," "She," "It." The article went on, "Particularly controversial was Wadūd's periodic substitution of the Arabic word for God, Allāh, with the pronouns, he, she and it, arguing that God's omnipresence defied gender definition." In her

slightly outdated, post-Vatican II apostasy (*ilhād*) of the Divine Name it appears Wadūd follows the lead of Pīr Wilāyat Khān and his syncretist, perennialist, New-Order "Sufi Order of the West." More relevantly she is reviving its scandalousness by trying to inject it into the mainstream and disturb not just a happy few but as many as possible.

The sociologist of American Islam Yvonne Haddad is quoted in the same article as saying, "People in America think they are going to be the vanguards of change, but for Arab Muslims in the Middle East, American Muslims continue to be viewed on the margins of the faith." (Haddad seems to think that American Muslims are viewed more favorably by non-Arab Muslims than by Arabs.)

In an interview titled "Dr. Amina Wadūd leads the Ummah in a Historical prayer"⁸ she is quoted as saying: "The end conclusion was that the principle of Ijtehad will be used to discontinue slavery even when the Quran did not advocate for its immediate end." While it is true the Qur'an did not command the immediate end of slavery it certainly advocated for its immediate end by equating the freeing of slaves with salvation and worship in many verses. Our teacher Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr gave this golden rule for self-hating Muslims over the issue of slavery in Islām: "Not one of the books of jurisprudence or its principles has a single chapter entitled 'slavery' in all Islām but they all have a chapter entitled 'emancipation.'"⁹

Wadūd also said, "The Quran worked to eradicate the previously negative practices toward women, and moved forward to justice. We must realize that this was done 14 centuries ago. At that time, it was not even possible to imagine women with spiritual equality." The contrary is true: it is precisely in our time that we are hard put to see women or men of high spiritual rank while it was frequent fourteen centuries ago to see women with spiritual superiority, let alone imagine women of spiritual equality, as stated by the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, in his glowing references to his first wife Khadīja, his youngest wife 'ā'isha, his daughter Fāṭima, various women of

the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*, and the women of former times such as āsia the wife of Pharaoh, the most truthful Virgin Mary, and others.

Wadūd then says, “We are members of our current History. We make History, we imagine our future.” The belief that “we make History” is the core of qadarism [absolute free will] which Wadūd here expresses more explicitly while it remains implicit in most of her statements about history, empowerment, and change. The belief in qadar which the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace taught is that it is Allāh that makes history and that its end has already been written while we remain (contrary to the heresy of fatalism and determinism) responsible for our actions.

“Leading salat (prayer) is representative of the devotion to ritual as well as the capability of participation for women,” Wadūd says. However, contrary to what it views as the abrogated dispensations of Judaism and Catholicism, Islām does not accept any change in its creed and worship. Leading *Ṣalāt* is an integral aspect (*hay’a*) of a Divinely-ordained pillar of worship, not a platform for the “participation” of a gender or this or that interest group. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, described this pillar as the central tent-pole of the Religion, announced it will be the first item of reckoning in the last Judgment, and warned us in his very last breath not to jeopardize it.

Wadūd continues, “Within the framework of intellectual development, common sense is always considered inferior and insufficient to ḥadīth or *fiqh*.” It is one of the more intellectually lazy and deceitful assumptions that the Islamic disciplines are somehow dissociated from basic common sense. In reality, intelligence is the soul of ḥadīth and *fiqh* and they are, of all the human discourses we know, its greatest proponents.¹⁰

Then Wadūd puts forward her grandly irresponsible idea that each man and each woman is his or her own Imām: “The final analysis is that each human is responsible for being a *Khilāfa* [*sic*] who must act like an agent responsible to obey Allāh, according to their best understanding

of interpretations from experts as well as for discussing alternatives brought about by real life experience.” Behind the gibberish read: “no leader, just me and myself” cultural revolution casting off the shackles of *ask the people of the remembrance, above every learned one there is one more learned, [obey] those in authority among you, and hold fast to the rope of Allāh and do not separate* as so many male constraints, substituting instead the idols of subjectivism and empiricism.

A person is responsible for his or her own actions and is duty-bound to follow the Divine dispensation whether or not they understand its expert interpretations or have “discussed” so-called alternatives on empirical bases. To follow a School of Law is precisely the safest and most Qur’ānic and Sunna-based way of discharging such a responsibility. It is simply not for each of the two billion Muslims of the planet to manufacture his or her own dissent under the pretext of individual responsibility, “according to their best understanding of interpretations from experts as well as for discussing alternatives brought about by real life experience”! *Khilāfa* is not a fluid honorific that gets to be used as a pretext to dissolve a Muslim’s categorical obligations into meaningless relativism that re-emerges into such forms as we see nowadays in free-wheeling, nihilistic pseudo-jihād.

Wadūd goes on to massacre exegesis and legal precedent through shallow misreadings of the Qur’ān and early history. She claims, “The second caliph of Islam, Hazrat Omar did not collect the booty as referenced in the Quran. This booty taking was a common practice at the time when the Quran was taken more literally.” In fact, our liege-lords Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Alī all collected the booty and distributed it in the same way to both the letter and the spirit of the Qur’ān. That there were some discontents in no way questions their understanding of the Qur’ān as any less literal than in the time of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. There is no difference in the basic Qur’anic distribution of the spoils of war, according to the four rightly-guided Caliphs and

the four Imāms of jurisprudence, from the time of Abū Bakr to that of 'Alī, Allāh be well-pleased with them.

Wadūd protests, "The interpretation that I should shut up and sit down was not the method that I would use to live Islam. I cannot be an agent or a khilafa [sic] unless I am honest about what is in my heart." Feminists who use the strawman of male silencing of women only reveal their ignorance of Islamic history, which shows anything but demure silent women. The woman who stood and corrected her *khalīfa* (our liege-lord 'Umar) in the midst of his Jumu'a sermon clearly did not "shut up and sit down." However, she was speaking from both knowledge and a sense of justice, not justice alone uninformed by knowledge. Hence 'Umar vindicated her. Moreover, all the while, she never at any point left the Qur'anic confines of *and [obey] those of you who are in authority*. She practiced *naṣiḥa* with the greater courage: within the system, not by trying to stab the system in the back with intimations of subversion and distrust from mediatized hiding-places. That woman won the palm of honesty here and hereafter and she would have taken to her heels at the mere idea of her being her own *khalīfa*.

"VIBES: Is it true that pre-Islamic women were braver and more out-going than those in the post-Islam era? Wadūd: No, I don't aspire to this view. Take the Prophet's wife, Khadija. She was unable to manage her own business without a male representative." How so? That our Mother Khadija relied on male employees does not automatically show she did not manage her own business without a male representative.

Wadūd admits that she used Divine worship for ulterior ends: "The fact is that a mixed congregational prayer is in no way a precedence of sorts, but simply a **public announcement that should lead to positive feelings**. I realize that this single act won't transform the community, but is symbolic of the possibilities within Islam." To intentionally use prayer as a public announcement is the soul of what the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, decried as self-display (*riyā'*) and the

minor polytheism (*al-shirk al-aṣghar*).

The *Umma* has always been uplifted by what is symbolic of the ideal within Islam, not by exploring the possibilities of chaos that are the undoing of human beings and societies. The *Dhikr* Allāh Most High guarantees to protect includes the truthful meaning, not just the letter of the Qur'ān. The *tahriḥ* or tampering the Qur'ān castigates denotes the meaning of the Torah before its letter. The importation of this *tahriḥ* into Islam is being promoted before our eyes as we speak. The first step to that *tahriḥ* is to divorce the Qur'ān from its hermeneutics, the Sunna. The final stage is that she "did not agree with the Qur'ān" itself as Wadūd is quoted as saying by Nazim Baksh in a Q-News article titled "Waking up to Progressive Muslims."¹¹

O Allāh! Protect us from knowledge which is of no benefit and from knowledge that will become a proof against us in the Next world! *Āmīn*. *Wal-ḥamdu lillāhi Rabb al-'ālamīn*.

Notes

¹Narrated from Sa'īd ibn Wahb by Abū 'Ubayd and Ya'qūb ibn Shayba as cited by Ibn Ḥajar in the *Fath* (13:291), Ibn al-Mubārak in *al-Zuhd* (p. 281), Ma'mar ibn Rāshid with a sound chain in his *Jāmi'* (in 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* 11:246), al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr* (9:114 §8589-8592) and *al-Awsaṭ* through narrators that were declared trustworthy according to al-Haythamī (1:135), al-Khaṭīb chainless in *al-Faqīh wal-Mutafaqqih* (2:79), Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm* (1:158, 2:159), and Abū Khaythama in *al-'Ilm* (§155). Al-Bayhaqī cites it in the chapter entitled "The Common Person's Imitation of the Learned One" (*Taqlīd al-'āmmī lil-'Ālim*) in his *Madkhal ilā al-Sunan al-Kubrā* (1:237-247).

²http://www.muslimwakeup.com/events/archives/2005/03/friday_prayer_1.php.

³www.mwlusa.org/publications/essays/polirights.html (June 2005), ditto www.mwlusa.org/publications/positionpapers/politics.html.

⁴Cf. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* ('Aṣriyya ed. p. 78-80=Afāq ed. p. 89-92) and his *Milal wal-Niḥal* (p. 74-76).

⁵ <http://www.newint.org/issue345/legacy.htm>. *New Internationalist* (vol. 345, May, 2002).

⁶From Abū Hurayra cf. Abū Dharr in al-Darīmī and Samura ibn Jundub in Aḥmad.

⁷<http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,1280,-4877315,00.html>.

⁸<http://naseeb.com/naseebvibes/\\prose-detail.php?aid=3631> as of 19 March 2005.

⁹Class communication.

¹⁰As the Prophet said, upon him blessings and peace, in his mass-transmitted saying, “For whomever Allāh desires immense good He grants them superlative understanding of the Religion.”

¹¹ http://www.ihyaafoundation.com/index.php?page=nazim_baksh/15 and <http://www.q-news.com/ProgressiveMuslims.pdf>.